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DEPARTMENT OF HIGHWAYS EMPLOYEE'S NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER 1981

Year of Progress

In the first issue of the newsletter, I stated that the Department of Highways was facing a number of challenges that would require the best from all of us. Only now that the Montana Legislature has completed the Special Session and Congress has adjourned, is the enormity of the challenge becoming clear.

But the past year has seen the Department take some important steps forward. I want to express my appreciation to those of you who have made the best effort, who have recognized the need to do a better job and given me and my staff the support and cooperation that allows us all to deliver a higher level of service to the public. That goes from those who I know spent Christmas Eve and Day on a snowplow, to those who have spent extra hours working on special assignments, and to those who have taken the time to make answers to telephone calls and letters responsive.

In Maintenance, for instance, the Federal Highway Administration concluded after its annual review, that the maintenance on Montana's highways this past year has been the best they have ever seen. Not perfect, of course, but certainly deserving of praise.

In Gross Vehicle Weight, you have taken steps to reduce the number of permits and amount of red tap facing truckers and have increased our ability to enforce the GVW laws.

In Engineering, you have begun to implement management systems that should allow us to more effectively carry out our construction program on schedule, as well as develop a formal process for selecting projects on the basis of need.

In Personnel and Civil Rights, you have begun to put selection and other personnel policies in writing, to let people know the procedures that they will be managed by, you have increased the emphasis on qualifications in the selection process, and moved toward the goal of equal opportunity for all Department of Highways' employees.

In Equipment, you have taken significant steps forward in giving the Department an up-to-date, well maintained equipment fleet upon which our maintenance and other programs depend.

Throughout the Department, Performance Appraisal is proceeding well, as the result of cooperation from all employees.

This is not all that has been done, and clearly we are not finished, but to all of you, thanks, and a belated Happy New Year.

NEW TRANSPORT

The Motor Pool and Equipment Division has purchased a tractor/trailer combination that will be used as a statewide transport, based at the Helena shop. Its primary function is to transport new and used equipment between Helena and the Divisions. It will also be available for emergency equipment transfers such as moving large loader/snowblowers into problem areas.

The unit consists of a 1976 White Freightliner with a 35 ton lowboy trailer. A

transport driver will be assigned to the unit and will work as part of the headquarters shop force.

This unit gives us the capability to move our heavier equipment such as the loader/blower combinations and the big dozers which we haven't had until this time. It will also be a cost saving measure because we will be able to utilize the unit to drop parts, supplies, etc. at Division points along its route while delivering or picking up equipment.

FEDS TAKE ANOTHER WHACK

Congress has approved a continuing resolution that will further reduce highway funding levels in the current fiscal year. Federal obligations for highway construction will be reduced slightly more than 2% in the current federal fiscal year. These reductions represent the compromise worked out with the Reagan administration, which in October proposed a 12% reduction. Montana had previously received notice that its obligation level would be \$73,053,000. The new cuts will further reduce the limit to \$71,101,000. This is a reduction of 19% from last years obligation level of \$87,700,000. The average for obligation levels for the past six years is \$97,000,000.

On December 16 a compromise bill to provide authority for an Interstate Program was approved by Congress and sent to the President.

Authority to apportion funds for the Interstate Program expired last year. The Senate and the House of Representatives have been at loggerheads over the form the continuation of the Interstate Program will take.

The compromise is in the form of a one year bill that will authorize an expanded 4R Program for the Interstate as well as provide a new cost estimate for completing the Interstate. The cost estimate was required before any further Interstate funds could be apportioned to the states. The new federal cost estimate for completion of the Interstate in Montana is \$157,854,000.

Montana's apportionments for the interstate 4R Program will be approximately \$12,700,000 compared to \$5,200,000 under the previous 3R program. Even though more apportionment authority may be available through the expanded program, the formula for allocating the apportionments is weighed heavily toward more populous state rather than states with more miles of Interstate Highway.

Transportation Plan:

Urban Growth Facilitator

With the rapid growth of Montana's urban areas, it becomes apparent to local officials and residents that a workable transportation plan is needed to help guide their city's development. The increased demands for transportation prompts local officials to request the assistance of the Department of Highways in resolving their city's transportation problems. Thus is born a cooperative effort between the city, county and state under the regulation of the Federal Government to provide an acceptable transportation system for area residents.

The Helena Area Transportation Plan Update offers an example of this "3-C" process, a process which in continuing, comprehensive and cooperative as authorized by the Federal-Aid Highway Acts and Urban Mass Transportation Act of 1964. Following the guidelines set up under these statutes, the Helena Technical Advisory Committee and Policy Coordinating Committee were organized in the early 1970's to provide overall management and coordination to the transportation planning process in Helena. For the transportation plan update, these committees were streamlined into one organization called the Transportation Coordinating Committee (TCC) in March, 1981. The TCC acts as a decision-making body as well as coordinator of input from various involved agencies into the plan update development.

Long Range Plan

The purpose of the transportation plan update is to analyze Helena's transportation problems and make recommended improvements to be implemented in both the near and far future. This analysis takes into account social, economic and environmental considerations, project growth, alternate modes, available funding and many other elements received as input from involved agencies. Then the TCC with the aid of the Montana Department of Highways will define problem areas and develop feasible improvements and alternates to be included in a Recommended Long Range Plan. From this plan, project priorities are selected through a cooperative effort and approved by TCC based on need and available funding levels. The completed transportation plan update will ultimately be incorporated into the current Helena Comprehensive Plan.

Letting Plans . . . December and January

The following is a list of the projects currently scheduled for the December 17th and January 28th bid openings.

Project Location	Month	Urban Projects	Miles
Billings	Dec.	Wicks Ln-Bench Blvd-grade, gravel, pave and light	01.0
Bozeman	Jan.	Babcock/Durston/19th St., grade, gravel, pave	0.5
Great Falls	Dec.	Interstate Projects I-15 Gore Hill/Ulm frontage road, upgrading, paving	03.5
Shelby-N/S	Dec.	I-15 pavement recycling, resurfacing	17.6
Bonner-East	Dec.	I-90 Interchange friction course paving	09.2
West of Hardin	Jan.	I-90, replace drain pipe	—
Avon-E/W	Dec.	Primary Projects Flood repair, two bridges over Little Blackfoot	—
Glasgow-Opheim	Dec.	Secondary Slope flattening, signing on MT-24	—
Billings	Jan.	Blue Creek grade, gravel, paving	08.1
Emigrant, Reynolds Pass, Roberts	Dec.	Miscellaneous Rest Areas, renovation, upgrading	—
All Divisions	Dec.	7 state-funded maintenance gravel crushing projects	—

PILOT PROGRAM FOR NEW COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM

In an effort to update and improve the communications between providers of emergency services within the state, a plan has been created by Department of Highways and Department of Administration communications personnel. The 1981 legislature authorized a pilot program to be initiated in the Great Falls Division with the Highway Patrol expanding into the Havre areas. The pilot program was to determine, by actual operation, the benefits to be gained by converting to a new radio communications system. The Department of Highways communications bureau has developed a system of it's own which will fit within the overall plan.

The Department of Justice and the Department of Highways will be installing new equipment. Other government agencies such as county and city operations will also be involved. A key element to this operation will be moving all agencies to a new high-band frequency spectrum which will allow many more users to operate on frequencies closer to one another. This will enable the various agencies to communicate with one another on a common channel for emergencies and other mutually beneficial operations.

The high band VHF frequencies which will be used offer many technical advantages beyond combining the numerous

users into closer proximity. The frequencies are much less susceptible to interference both from "skip" and impulse noise such as flashers and engine ignitions. These frequencies also provide "mobile relay" operation. This gives any mobile unit the power of communicating with another mobile unit through the base station directly. This will greatly increase the mobile-to-mobile coverage in a given area.

At this time, all frequency coordination with adjoining states has taken place and the appropriate license applications have been submitted to the F.C.C.

The state term contract was written last spring to include equipment suitable for this operation. As the result of a competitive bid, sixty-five mobiles and three base stations have been ordered for the Department of Highways. If the equipment arrives by the end of February, initial operation should begin in March.

The low band mobile radios which are removed will be distributed throughout the other divisions which will help satisfy the need to increase the number of vehicles with radios throughout the state.

If the results of this pilot program live up to preliminary radio surveys, other divisions will be converted in the coming years as the budget allows.

RETIREMENT SYSTEM

The Montana Public Employees' Retirement System (PERS), with approximately \$300 million of assets, operates to provide regular and disability retirements to public employees, and death benefits to survivors of public employees.

Public employees who are expected to work more than 120 days per year must belong to PERS. An employee is vested in the system after five years of service and is then entitled to retirement benefits regardless of continued employment.

The employee's cost of this retirement program is 6.0% of all salaries received (regular time, overtime, differential pay, leave, etc.). The employer's share is 6.32% of these same salary items.

Regular Retirement Formula

$$\frac{\text{number of years service}}{60} \times \frac{\text{average of employees' highest 3-year salary}}{\text{highest}} = \text{retirement allowance}$$

PERS provides for no actuarial reduction of the formula if the employee is (1) over age 60 at time of retirement or, (2) has more than 30 years of creditable service.

However, an employee can retire at age 50, with an actuarial reduction if he/she has 5 years or more of service. The retiree can choose from various retirement op-

tions, if desired, in order to provide benefits to a beneficiary.

Disability Retirement

Employees with more than 5 years of PERS service qualify for disability retirement if medical evidence proves the employee is disabled to the extent that job duties cannot be performed. This retirement allowance is the greater of:

- (1) 25% of the employee's average highest three years' salary or,
- (2) 90% of the regular retirement formula (above).
- (3) Additional factors are used if the disabled employee chooses to provide benefits to his beneficiary.

Military Service Additive

Employees can add to their public service if they served in the military service and desire to purchase up to 5 years of this time. Military service may be purchased after the 10th year of public service on a basis of one month's military service for each month's public employment. The cost of the military service time is the same as the amount the employee pays on his salary earnings during the 11th through 15th year. If not paid during this period, interest is added to the regular amount due.

Death Benefits

- (1) Return of the employee's contribution plus accumulated interest and

payment of one month's salary for each year's PERS service up to a maximum of six months salary payment.

- (2) The survivor of an employee with over 5 years service may elect to take a monthly survivor's benefit. This is calculated on the number of years the employee worked and the beneficiary's age in relationship to the deceased.

Employees should be aware of whom they have designated as beneficiary as conditions change from year to year as there may be a need for a change in the beneficiary. For example: a marriage, divorce, death of spouse or beneficiary may call for a new beneficiary. Changes can be made by contacting the PERS office in the Department of Administration in Helena.

Persons, regardless of their length of employment, when terminating public employment, may elect to leave their contributions on deposit with PERS or withdraw them. Whenever the contributions were withdrawn, interest will also be paid. Currently, the interest is credited at 7.5%. If withdrawn, the interest paid is taxable, the contributions are not taxable.

Employees who would like specific information about their retirement are urged to contact Public Employees' Retirement Division, 1712 Ninth Avenue, Helena.

Outside Applicants . . . Considered After Laid-Off Employees

This article in a series from personnel is to inform you, the employee, of the process of filling vacant permanent positions from outside the Department.

When a position has been posted and no one applies for the position or the employees who do apply are not qualified for the position, we must find qualified applicants from outside the department.

At the present time, employees who have been laid off are automatically considered for vacant positions before Job Service is asked to provide applicants.

The Personnel Division prepares a job order and sends it to the Job Service. Depending on the nature of the vacancy, Job Service is given seven working days to recruit qualified applicants. Job Service applications are listed on the Outside Applicant Referral form by Personnel and sent to the supervisor for consideration. Personnel may or may not do preliminary screening.

The supervisor considers the applicants in accordance with the selection guidelines. When the selection process is

completed, the Outside Applicant Referral with comments in job related terms is returned to the Personnel Division with all applications attached. Sections "E-I" of the Applicant Log are also completed and returned to the Personnel Division by the supervisor.

Personnel then sends an approval letter to the person selected and the supervisor. Those not selected are also notified.

Performance Appraisal

Performance appraisal planning for most Division Administrators and Bureau Chiefs has been completed. The planning for the rest of the Department is proceeding according to timelines set in these performance plans. To date we have received relatively few questions. Remember, the Personnel Division is available to help you if there is a need.

Retirements

Recent retirees with over 20 years of service at the Montana Department of Highways include: Gordon H. Booth, Cascade; Ernest M. Hankin, Three Forks, and Clinton P. Fulkerson, Helena.

Special Session Ignores Roads

The Special Session of the Legislature met in late November to consider cuts in federal funding. Governor Ted Schwinden included funding for highways in his call to the Legislature. The Senate rejected the administration backed bill to increase fuel taxes sponsored by Senator Chet Blaylock (D-Laurel).

In the House a bill to appropriate funds for highways from the Coal Tax Trust Fund was also rejected. The bill to tap the coal fund was sponsored by Representative Paul Pistoria (D-Great Falls).

The fuel tax proposal was narrowly rejected by the Senate Taxation Committee. The Senate committee also rejected amendments that would have given a portion of the new fuel tax to cities and counties. Efforts to bring the fuel tax proposal to the Senate floor for a full debate were defeated on a vote of 26 to 24.

In opposing any action of highway funding at this time, the Republican Legislative leadership pointed to the efforts of interim legislative committees studying the Department of Highways. The leadership indicated that a funding proposal will be forthcoming from the Interim Committee on Highways.

Increased G.V.W. Enforcement Staff

As a result of funds appropriated by the 1981 Legislative Assembly, 14 additional G.V.W. Enforcement Officer I positions have been added to the G.V.W. Enforcement Bureau, bringing the total to 71 officers.

The new positions are located as follows: Billings, Bonner, Broadus, Culbertson, Crow Agency (2), Drummond (2), Great Falls, Harlowton, Lima, Shelby, and Wibaux (2).

Each officer must spend three months in on-the-job training, as well as successfully completing the six-week Basic School at the Montana Law Enforcement Academy in Bozeman, before being granted the powers of arrest.

Also, in September 1981, the Enforcement Bureau was re-structured. Instead of the previous eight geographical areas, there are now five, with headquarters at Billings, Butte, Glendive, Great Falls, and Missoula. A G.V.W. Area Supervisor is located in each of these cities.

Three travelling G.V.W. Officer positions were also created with headquarters in Bozeman, Columbia Heights, and Miles City.

The re-structuring and the additional officers will enable the G.V.W. Division to provide increased hours of coverage at certain high volume stations and also permit more portable weighing to be accomplished.

1900 copies of this newsletter were produced at a cost of \$.15 each.

Rae Childs, Public Information Officer, Editor

New System Consolidates Employee Information

Security

The State Auditor's Office Central Payroll Division will implement a new Payroll/Personnel/Position Control System (PPPS) beginning in January 1982. This system will combine current payroll information such as tax deductions and will provide various employee personnel information on paychecks such as current balances for compensatory, annual and sick leave, state service hours, merit service dates, longevity increment dates, pension information and better insurance information.

This system will use an integrated computer Database which means all information is placed in the system only once and is arranged in such a way that there is no difficulty relating any data item to any other.

The data placed on this system consists of both legally required information and voluntary information requiring employee cooperation. Statutory information includes Social Security Number, Federal and State Tax Withholding Status, FICA Status, Race/Age Information, and Handicap Information. The system will also manage the number of positions authorized by the legislature and the authorized classifications of these positions as required in the State Personnel Classification Plan. The State of Montana has developed extensive Security/Privacy procedures to protect all employee rights as provided by statutory language, constitutional provisions, and suggestions of the 1974 Report of the Privacy Commission. The executive agencies of the State of Montana are directed to maintain data integrity at the highest level possible and no secret records shall be kept on any state employee.

Employee Rights

State employees will be given a printout of their master file containing all information in the system relating to them upon the employee's request. All employees will be informed of this right upon hire and annually. Employees have the right to delete any information from the master file other than information required for pay purposes or required by law.

Information will be available only to user agencies on a need to know principle consisting of payroll clerks, personnel officers and direct-in-line supervisors. Any individual or agency requesting information relating to an employee's proficiency, termination, skill functions, education or personal background contained in the master system must have written permission from both the employee and the employing agency stating the specific reasons for the request.

Central Agencies such as the state Personnel Division, Payroll Division and the Office of Budget and Program Planning have access to statistical information. The Legislative Auditor has access to any information related to the performance of their statutory function without violating the employee's right of privacy. The Attorney General has ruled that under Article II, Section 9 of the Montana Constitution, a State Employee's title, dates and duration of employment and salary are public information. Requests for such information should be in writing but no reason or justification is required and such information may be released without the employee's consent.

NEWSLETTER READER SURVEY

In order for us to continue to send you this newsletter, we must know if it has value to you. If you wish to receive future copies, please complete the following questionnaire and return this card.

1. How do you find the articles?

- ☐ Too Technical ☐ About Right
☐ Too General ☐ _____

2. How many times should the newsletter be published each year?

- ☐ Monthly ☐ Semi-Annually
☐ Bi-Monthly ☐ _____
☐ Quarterly

3. Do you wish to receive future issues of the newsletter?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

4. Are there any special subjects you would like to see presented? If so, briefly explain below.

OTHER COMMENTS:

Montana State Library



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